



**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

Office of Public Affairs
Media Relations

Washington, DC 20420
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Fact Sheet

June 2005

Transition Assistance in the VA Military Services Program

The Department of Veterans Affairs has a long history of special efforts to bring information on VA benefits and services to active duty military personnel.

These efforts include counseling about VA benefits through the Transition Assistance Program, a nationally coordinated federal effort to assist military men and women to ease the transition to civilian life through employment and job training assistance. A second component of the program, the Disabled Transition Assistance Program, helps separating servicemembers with disabilities.

VA also has launched special efforts to provide a "seamless transition" for those returning from service in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. Internal coordination was improved, and efforts currently focus on reducing red tape and streamlining access to all VA benefits. Each VA medical facility and benefits regional office has identified a point of contact to coordinate activities locally to help meet the needs of these returning combat servicemembers and veterans. In addition, VA increased the staffing of benefits counselors at key military hospitals where severely wounded servicemembers from Iraq and Afghanistan are frequently sent. Further details about the initiatives for today's veterans of the global war on terrorism are described at www.va.gov/OPA/fact/returning_vets.html, and general information for these newest veterans is available on a special VA Web page at <http://www.seamlesstransition.va.gov/>.

Even before beginning the Transition Assistance Program pilot program, VA put a high priority on outreach to military members nearing separation from active duty. From its inception, VA has applied a broader definition to its military services outreach, called the VA Military Services Program. While the Transition Assistance Program and Disabled Transition Assistance Program are the centerpieces, the broader definition encompasses preseparation and retirement briefings, outreach to reserve and National Guard units, and liaison and counseling services with various military post activities such as personal affairs, community affairs, and education offices.

VA operates a longstanding Veterans Assistance at Discharge System, from which all veterans recently separated or retired from active duty, including reserve and Guard members, receive a letter from the secretary of Veterans Affairs with information on VA benefits and services. Special mailings are also sent concerning VA education, home loan guaranty, and insurance benefits.

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VA also operates a benefits delivery at discharge program that assists servicemembers at participating military bases with development of VA disability compensation claims before their discharge. This fosters continuity of care between the military and VA systems and speeds up VA's processing of their application for compensation. The predischarge physical is conducted under VA disability examination protocols either by VA medical centers, contract medical examiners or military personnel.

Transition Assistance Program Began with 1989 Pilot

The Veterans Benefits Amendments of 1989 provided for a three-year pilot program of transition assistance conducted jointly by VA, the Department of Defense and the Department of Labor. The Transition Assistance Program provides separating servicemembers employment assistance, job training assistance and other transitional services, including counseling on VA benefits and services.

The Disabled Transition Assistance Program for disabled servicemembers offers personalized vocational rehabilitation and employment assistance at major military medical centers where such separations occur and at other military installations.

During fiscal year 2004, VA representatives conducted over 7,000 briefings, which were attended by more than 261,000 active duty personnel and their families living in the United States. Included were 1,400 briefings for more than 88,000 reserve and National Guard members for whom VA provides pre- and postdeployment briefings. In fiscal year 2005, VA has conducted nearly 4,000 transition briefings attended by more than 157,000 participants in the United States. Of those, 974 were for more than 68,000 reserve and Guard members.

The Department of the Army has implemented its own version of transition services, the Army Career and Alumni Program. There are dozens of ACAP sites both in the United States and overseas. The Army also operates a Web site at www.armyds3.org featuring special services for today's combat veterans, intended to help severely disabled soldiers and their families cut through red tape so they can more easily tap into services available to them through the military and VA. The Disabled Soldier Support System — DS3 for short — gives wounded soldiers an additional way to seek out the help or information they need until they can return to active duty or receive a medical retirement from the Army.

Three-Day Seminars Cover Benefits and Entitlements

VA's goal for the Transition Assistance Program is to ensure that servicemembers are aware of their VA benefits and to provide assistance as needed. For those leaving active duty because of medical problems, the outreach effort is intensified to ensure a full understanding of the VA compensation process and vocational rehabilitation and employment program.

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Transition Assistance Program participation is voluntary and consists of three-day seminars conducted by VA, DOD and DOL at military installations for personnel within one year of separation or two years of retirement. It provides a number of services to assist military personnel in making a smooth transition to civilian life, including employment assistance, such as resume writing and skills marketing; job referral; and other transitional services.

In addition, VA military services coordinators are in place at each VA regional office. Some coordinators are placed near large military populations, and some are based on military installations. Some of them work fulltime on military coordinating duties.

The coordinators and other VA benefits counselors participate in Transition Assistance Program and Disabled Transition Assistance Program seminars and conduct personal interviews. They also conduct benefits briefings at other military preseparation and retirement programs and are involved in outreach to members of reserve and National Guard units. The coordinators and counselors work directly with offices on military installations that provide education, medical, family and personal counseling, and casualty assistance. Returning reserve and Guard members also can elect to attend a formal Transition Assistance Program or Disabled Transition Assistance Program workshop.

Worldwide Services

Concerned that military personnel overseas have less access to information about veterans' benefits than their stateside counterparts, VA and DOD began in 1992 to provide briefings to personnel stationed in Europe, the Far East, Panama, and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Since then, VA transition activities in Europe were expanded, as were visits to the Far East. VA currently has counselors assigned in Germany, England, Italy, Korea, and Japan. Circuit-traveling service provides periodic briefings in Spain, Iceland, the Azores and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

In addition to the transition briefings conducted in the United States, in fiscal year 2004 VA conducted 625 overseas transition briefings for more than 15,180 servicemembers. To date this fiscal year, VA has conducted 232 overseas transition briefings for more than 5,600 servicemembers. VA and DOL staff conducted Transition Assistance Program briefings on board the USS Constellation, USS Enterprise, and USS George Washington on their return to the United States from extended deployments. VA expects to continue to support additional requests from the Department of the Navy for Transition Assistance Program briefings on board ships.

Benefits Delivery at Discharge

This joint VA/DOD initiative is helping servicemembers file for and receive service-connected disability compensation benefits more quickly than in the past. VA on average adjudicates these claims within 60 to 70 days of discharge by examining servicemembers under VA protocols as part of the discharge process. By comparison, VA's national average processing time is about 170 days for claims requiring a disability rating.

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In the benefits delivery at discharge program, the medical information needed to begin the VA file carries over from DOD to VA seamlessly. In addition, if a servicemember is found to be disabled, additional applicable vocational rehabilitation and employment services may be initiated in a timely manner. This expedited BDD process is used by servicemembers applying for benefits within 180 days of discharge.

Currently, 140 military installations worldwide participate in this program, including sites in Germany and in Korea. In fiscal year 2003, VA processed just under 26,000 BDD claims; and in fiscal year 2004, VA processed 39,000 claims under the program.

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